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RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 1009
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1168
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6443
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 008657

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/26/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PREF](#) [VE](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: GOC ACCEPTS CHAVEZ PROPOSAL FOR "OPERATION
TRANSPARENCY" TO RECOVER THREE FARC HOSTAGES

REF: BOGOTA 8618

Classified By: Political Counselor John Creamer - Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On December 26, the GOC accepted a proposal from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to send an international commission with representatives from France, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, and Cuba to Colombia to recover three FARC-held hostages. The commission would travel to an unknown location in Colombia provided by the FARC via GOV helicopters with ICRC markings. President Alvaro Uribe quickly accepted Chavez' proposal, designating GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo as the GOC contact and insisting that ICRC markings be placed on any aircraft participating in the operation. The ICRC in Colombia confirmed they would use their "good offices" to facilitate a cross-border release if both the GOC and GOV authorized the mission. End summary.

Chavez Proposal

2 (U) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez called on the GOC on December 26, to accept an international commission-- composed of representatives from France, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, and Cuba--that would fly from Venezuela to points in Colombia to receive hostages Clara Rojas, her son Emmanuel, and former Congresswomen Consuelo Gonzales de Perdomo from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He noted that the Venezuelan Vice Foreign Minister would provide the GOC with a written proposal shortly.

¶3. (U) Chavez said the commission would travel from one of several possible airports in Venezuela near the Colombian border to Villavicencio (capitol of the eastern department of Meta) in Venezuelan Government aircraft and helicopters, operating under International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) markings. The commission would then travel from Villavicencio to an "unknown destination" that would be provided later by the FARC to receive the hostages. The Commission would return to Venezuela with the hostages, based on the FARC's conditions for release (reftel). He stressed that the hostages' travel to Venezuela was an explicit FARC

request, "not his personal whim."

¶4. (U) Chavez said the commission could travel as soon as December 27, pending GOC approval of the proposal. Chavez said he was acting on purely humanitarian grounds, urged the GOC to accept the proposal, and added that outside actors (the USG) would likely try to derail the plan. He reiterated his willingness to resume a facilitation role in a humanitarian accord if President Uribe authorized him to do so, and said "clandestine" options to recover the hostages remained available if the GOC rejected the proposal.

GOC Considers Response

¶5. (C) President Uribe approved the request within hours after meeting with key advisors, on the condition that any aircraft have ICRC markings. He also designated Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo as the GOC contact for the operation. Presidential advisor Jose Obdulio Gaviria told us he had recommended to Uribe that the GOC accept Chavez' proposal, but that it insist that the ICRC manage all operational details. He said such an operation would be similar to the ICRC's recovery of the remains of eleven Valle de Cauca state legislators murdered by the FARC in June. Gaviria said Chavez' participation--as well as the involvement of other international observers--was a "bitter pill to swallow," but added that the GOC had little choice. Colombian and international public opinion would continue to press the GOC to make concessions to obtain the hostages' release if it did not accede to Chavez's proposal.

ICRC Offers "Good Offices"

¶6. (C) ICRC Director in Colombia Barbara Hintermann told us the ICRC had offered its "good offices" to both the Venezuelan and Colombian Governments--and to the FARC--to facilitate any hostage release. The ICRC's offices in Caracas had not received a formal request from the GOV with details of the new Chavez proposal. She added that the ICRC would be willing to consider utilizing GOV aircraft or helicopters in a cross-border, international operation--but only with explicit GOV and GOC approval. Hintermann said she had been in contact with her offices in Caracas and with GOC Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo to reiterate the ICRC offer of assistance on December 26.

Nichols